



By H. G. FODOR.

*Illustrated by Frances Hodgkins.*

THE song of a *tui* came through the open window, and the hum of bees was in the air. The windows of the house were open to let in the soft winds and sounds from without. In the kitchen Annie, the maid, was singing at the top of her voice, not unmelodiously. Annie liked the sound of her own voice, and she did not like silence. At an open window sat an exceedingly pretty girl. She had a stocking drawn over her hand, and she was supposed to be mending it. At present, however, she was merely picking a large darning-needle in and out of the apron on her lap, and listening, not to the *tui*, nor to Annie's song, but to the chatter of her girl friend, who was sitting on the bed and swinging her feet backwards and forwards with the energy of one who recognises that she is on a holiday visit, and has not a single thing to do except enjoy herself. Elsa Macdonald was a lively little creature, who gave those who did not know her well the impression that there was not much in her beyond what was seen on the surface. But Phyllis Bourne, her friend, knew better. Phyllis was sweet-faced and serious—particularly at the present moment,

Something in Elsa's apparently disjointed chatter had set her thinking. She was usually so lonely that she felt inclined to make confidences.

Elsa rambled on, appearing to take no notice of her friend's serious face, or of the idle needle, which no longer plied industriously in and out of the stockings.

"And the crowd on Jubilee Day, and the mass of people in the Agricultural Hall in the evening—you can't say that did not come up to your expectations, Phyl?"

"Oh, no, that was wonderful! I know you think me a very dissatisfied person, Elsa, but it is not that kind of thing that disappoints me. It is the aspirations and ideas I used to have. The older I grow, the more I seem to lose. I used to dream of great things. I wished to do something in the world. But it came to this: father and the boys wanted me, and here I stay."

"And Tom Hartley wants you——"

"Oh, don't, Elsa, don't talk so frivolously about what is very serious!"

"Well," said Elsa soberly, "I wish I had a father and brothers, and a sweetheart!"

"That is just where the trouble comes in," replied Phyllis, with a sigh. "There's poor, dear Tom, now! He's so different from what I thought. I mean I always pictured to myself what my lover would be like. In the books I read, they were always so different."

"Yes, you expected some fine gentleman to come, like a knight of old, and rescue you from the clutches of some terrible monster who was waiting to devour you. Or, perchance, some titled person would come here, see, and fall in love with Miss Phyllis Bourne's brown eyes and auburn hair, and take her away to England, where she would be the centre of admiration for all the world."

"Now Elsa, you are laughing at me. I shall tell you no more."

"I beg your pardon, Phyl, I'm not. Only I can't understand why you don't like such a very devoted lover as Tom Hartley. He just worships the ground you tread on; he is faithfulness itself."